



Subject:	City Development & Regeneration
Date:	19 th April 2024
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide Members with an update on the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Development Tracker, capturing regeneration and development activity which took place in the City Centre

	during 2023, as aligned to the eight core policies of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS). The detail of this report will be provided by way of a presentation at Committee. This also follows the agreement at the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in February 2024 that a regular update on city centre developments be included on the SPR agenda.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Note the overview of city centre development and regeneration activity during 2023 as provided within the attached Regeneration Tracker (Appendix 1). The tracker is aligned to the eight core principles set out in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy - the regeneration policy for the city centre. This follows a presentation of the Regeneration Tracker made to the City Growth & Regeneration Committee in April and the agreement at the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in February 2024 that a regular update on city centre developments be included on the SPR agenda. A brief overview of the Regeneration Tracker presentation will be provided at SPR Committee. ii) Note that this presentation provides a high-level overview of some of the challenges and proposed next steps to help unlock the next stage of the delivery of the Regeneration & Investment Strategy priorities. Further reports will be brought back on a number of these issues including proposals for a reframed City Centre Investment Fund, the Place Based Growth Proposition, the Regeneration Framework, A Bolder Vision and updates on the outworking's of the All-Party Roundtable on housing led regeneration. iii) Note that, as agreed at the February meeting of the SP&R Committee, a special meeting will be held to consider the Regeneration Framework, city centre development and heritage assets.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the February meeting of the SP&R Committee it was agreed that a regular update on city centre developments would be included on the SPR agenda. Regular reports are brought to the CGR Committee on the Future City Centre Programme, the Regeneration & Development Tracker and other workstreams including the Housing Led Regeneration Programme, Bolder Vision and the Place Based Growth Proposition. However, given the role that the City Centre plays at a regional and local level in terms of job creation, economic impact opportunity and rates income, regular updates on these issues will also be brought to the SP&R Committee which will help inform the Council's position in terms of policy, corporate priorities and investment decisions. This is particularly relevant as the Council moves towards agreeing a new Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan and in light of the Belfast Agenda Refresh.

3.2	<p>The city centre provides an important role for Belfast, the Council and the wider region given Belfast's role as the regional driver and the critical role the city centre in particular plays in terms of employment, investment, tourism, education and a place to live and to visit. The city centre makes up 2.6% of Belfast's spatial area but represents the largest employment base employing over 86,000 workers across the various sectors, representing c37% of Belfast's workforce. Approx 80% of the Council's income comes from the district rate, with the city centre accounting for 42% of Belfast's non-domestic rates income equating to 27% of the Council's total rates income. The sectors contributing greatest to city centre rates are the office sector (60% of city centre non-domestic rate or 16% of Council's total rate income) and retail (22.5% of city centre non-domestic rate or 6% of Council's total rate income). From 2020/21 to 2022/23 the city centre non-domestic rate has increased year on year going from £42.19m to £46.52m over this 3-year period.</p>
3.3	<p>The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) sets out our collective ambition for the continued growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas for the period 2015 to 2030. It contains a road map of policies to guide city centre decision-making and key projects that translate those policies into action, aligned to our overarching ambitions outlined within the Belfast Agenda. BCCRIS seeks to address the universal elements of a thriving city centre as well as challenges and conditions that are unique to Belfast and is underpinned by the following eight core principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase the Employment Population;• Increase the Residential Population;• Manage the Retail Offer;• Maximise the Tourism Opportunity;• Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres;• Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre;• Connect to the City Around, and• Shared space and social impact.
3.4	<p>To facilitate the implementation of the eight policies for the city centre, BCCRIS identified a series of projects aimed at creating a liveable and economically thriving city, alongside, identifying the following five Special Action Areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inner North• Inner West• North East Quarter• Transport Hub and South Centre

- Oxford Street and the Eastern Bank

3.5 The purpose of the annual Regeneration & Development Tracker (Appendix 1) is to provide an overview of regeneration and development activity which has taken place in Belfast City Centre and Titanic Quarter during 2023 (1st January – 31st December), aligned to the eight core policies outlined within the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. An overview of the Future City Centre Performance Dashboard (as reported to the City Centre All Party Working Group and CGR) is also included, providing an overview of footfall, jobs, vacancy, and cleanliness and safety among other indicators to provide a health check overview of the performance of the city centre.

3.6 A number of the core principles and projects and developments identified within BCCRIS have progressed well since 2015 to date, including during 2023 which is the focus of the attached Regeneration Tracker presentation. This has included significant office development, hotel and tourism, purpose-built student accommodation and major developments identified in BCCRIS such as the relocation of the University Ulster, progression of the new Transport Hub and Weavers Cross development, progression of City Deal projects including the Belfast Stories tourist attraction, waterfront development etc. Whilst retail across the UK has remained challenging, previous reports to the CGR Committee have highlighted that footfall figures have recovered well in the city centre, and that primary retail core ground floor vacancy levels have decreased from 23% to 21% with a number of new first to Belfast /first to market brands and the Vacant to Vibrant scheme assisting in this transition.

3.7 It is however recognised that challenges remain around city centre living, place-shaping and public realm, dereliction, and infrastructure investment. As reported to CGR and SP&R in February 2024 the lack of regeneration related funding for Belfast (and the wider region) as compared to other UK city regions has put Belfast at a distinct disadvantage in terms of city competitiveness and addressing issues of viability, place making and progressing development and regeneration including housing and increased city centre living. As highlighted to Committee there are a number of funding streams available in other UK cities that have helped accelerate development inc the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund, Future High Streets Fund, Transforming Cities Fund etc. The experience from other cities has shown that these have been critical in order to realise the full regeneration potential of their city centres and to meet wider city region requirements.

3.8 Notwithstanding the lack of this external funding, the Regeneration Tracker presentation highlights positive development activity during the 2023 period across the private and public sectors. In order to deliver the growth ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda to 2035 it has

been estimated that this will require c £5.5bn investment and clearly the role of the private sector is critical in this. The Regeneration Tracker details the extensive private sector development delivered in 2023 along with highlighting a number of projects and initiatives where Belfast City Council are leading on the delivery of and addressing some of our key sectors for growth and aligning to our corporate priorities. This includes the Housing Led Regeneration Programme, the Bolder Vision, Strategic Property Acquisitions, Belfast Region City Deal Projects inc Belfast Stories, Cathedral Gardens redevelopment, 2 Royal Avenue, the Vacant to Vibrant Programme, Belfast 2024 cultural activities etc.

3.9 An update on these various areas of work have been brought previously to both CGR and SP&R Committees. In terms of city centre living specifically it is worth highlighting the update brought to the March CGR Committee in relation to the housing led regeneration programme. This included an update on the Development Partner process where Members had been advised of the progress on the competitive dialogue process with 3 bidders for a significant multi-site, residential led mixed use regeneration development opportunity (c £630m GDV). This followed the development of a number of Concept Regeneration Plans for Council and wider public and private sector lands and PADS for a number of cluster sites, and represents a significant decision by the Council in terms of utilising public sector assets across a number of sites to bring forward a long-term partner to fund, develop and where appropriate own and manage assets through the partnership to deliver residential-led mixed-use regeneration across the city. Members were also updated on the reframed Inner North- West Development Brief which has been forwarded to Housing Associations, following the previous pause at the request of Members and liaison with DfC as landowners and in conjunction with NIHE. An update was also provided in relation to the city-wide Strategic Site Assessments where planning appraisals and feasibility studies are being completed, with updates to be brought initially to the Area Working Groups from May onwards.

3.10 It is worth highlighting that there are a significant number of consented residential units / schemes that have come through the planning system in the city centre particularly, and that many of these have not progressed for various reasons including issues around viability, policy, supporting infrastructure etc, most of which are outside Council's responsibility. Notwithstanding this however it is worth noting that there are currently over 1,000 homes under construction across 6 city centre sites, and over 1,550 social homes under construction across the city. As agreed by Members at CGR in March it is also intended to hold an All-Party Roundtable with Party Group leaders or their nominees on Housing Regeneration to consider the various housing regeneration issues in more detail.

	Opportunities & Challenges & Future Priorities /Next Steps
3.11	The Regeneration Tracker presentation also provides a brief overview (final slide) on some of the challenges and proposed next steps to unlocking the next stage of the delivery of the Regeneration & Investment Strategy for discussion and future consideration with Members. Updates have been provided to both the SPR and CGR Committees on some of these issues including the disparity of regeneration funding applied to Northern Ireland in comparison to other UK cities and the benefit of a Regeneration Framework that would seek to align the city and Council's strategic priorities to support and strengthen the city's position in relation to investment and funding opportunities to deliver economic, social and commercial outcomes aligned to the Belfast Agenda; the Bolder Vision etc. Further updates on these, alongside proposals for a reframed City Centre Investment Fund will be brought to Committee. As agreed at the SP&R February meeting a special meeting will also take place of the SP&R Committee to consider the Regeneration Framework, city centre development and heritage assets with the meeting date to be confirmed in the near future.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.12	None associated with this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.13	None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix A – Regeneration Tracker 2023 Update.